

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

I would like to thank the Southwest Rotary Club of Eureka for their part in the presentation honoring our veterans on November 11<sup>th</sup> at the Adorni Center in Eureka. For the past three years, I have had the honor of representing the Merchant Marine Veterans. Not all Veterans Day observances include the Merchant Marine as they were not an integral part of the United States Armed Services but a group of civilians who put themselves at risk each day they were on the high seas. In fact, most of the younger generation have no idea what the Merchant Marine was or how they functioned. When you see pictures or film of massed ships participating in the convoys and various amphibian invasions of World War Two, you accept the fact that they were ships of the United States naval fleet plus our allies. The composition of a wartime fleet not only included naval warships but also merchant ships loaded with supplies. Most of these cargo ships were privately owned by the nation's steamship companies. They were under contract to the federal government and crewed by civilian seaman. The convoys of ships who traveled together for mutual defense were mostly privately owned ships with a civilian crew, and armed with guns operated by members of the U. S. Navy consisting of a small group of men called the "Armed Guard". The civilian seaman was not armed but was there to operate the ship. Although the civilian was not trained to fight, he became involved when a ship was attacked. Many a seaman served as an ammunition passer and took over guns when the military gunners were wounded or killed.. If a ship was hit by gunfire or torpedoes the civilian seaman was wounded or killed as readily as the military man. So there you have it, merchant seaman taking the same risk as the naval sailor with a huge number losing their lives during the war. For many years, following World War Two much discussion took place as to how the civilian merchant seaman should be honored, if at all. The group was not recognized for many years and a great majority of the old timers never lived long enough to be recognized as war veterans. It is true that they did not belong to a military organization but they suffered the same fate during military actions. It is with great pride that I represent these fallen heroes. I have had the privilege to hear the stories of many of these merchant seaman who graced our area and have gone on to another world. I am sorry that more people don't know the history of the Merchant Marine and its heroes. My time spent in the Merchant Marine was relatively short and somewhat uneventful but I am proud to have served. Thanks again to Southwest Rotary for including the merchant seaman of World War Two.

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